December 15, 1969

Mr. Robert Donovan
Los Angeles Times
1700 Pennsylvania Ave. N. W.
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Donovan:

Just a note to tell you that I read with the greatest of interest your article on certain C. I. A. activities that appeared in your paper on Thursday morning. Understandably, I hate to see any article of any kind on the C. I. A. appear in the news. I feel that the national interest would best be served if people forgot about the C. I. A. and let it go about its business anonymously and with the efficiency and competence which they possess. This, however, does not seem to be the wish of the people and articles have appeared and will continue to appear as will books, reviews and all the rest.

Despite all of this, I compliment you on your article. I thought it was very well done and interestingly highlighted the very important analytical and estimative function of the C. I. A. This activity of theirs which they pursue with such confidence is overlooked by most who write about the Agency for they are carried away with the "James Bond" side of the story and they forget or fail to recognize that the Agency's real service to the President and real contribution to our country comes from the conclusions they reach and the advice that they give after carefully analyzing and synthesizing all available intelligence which flows into them from the many sources mentioned in your article and others not mentioned.

A good job!

With warm regards,

Sincerely,

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cc: [redacted]

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EXECUTIVE REGISTRY FILE Mc Cone

Computers, Ph.D.s Solve Siberian Puzzle

BY ROBERT J. DONOVAN
Times Washington Bureau Chief

WASHINGTON — Last August when the world was worrying about a Sino-Soviet holocaust growing out of border disputes in the Far East Richard Helms, director of Central Intelligence, informed President Nixon that the CIA did not believe a major war was likely.

The CIA's probes into the affairs on the mysterious Trans-Siberian Railroad—probes helped by a stray American tourist who had briefly managed to count Soviet troop trains—were an important element in this conclusion.

Certain information supplied clandestinely, photographs taken by "spy" satellites high above the Soviet maritime provinces, intercepted radio messages, the activities of Soviet officials, Soviet air traffic in the Far East and the nature of the Soviets' propaganda to their own people all helped fill in the picture.

Prolonged Cold War

Thus, although the Chinese and the Russians were hurling almost warlike invective at each other, the CIA's estimate of the Kremlin's propaganda was that it was preparing the Soviet people not for a major shooting war but for a prolonged cold war with China.

In several widely scattered parts of the world Soviet officials dropped hints, which quickly reached the CIA—and were probably meant to—that the Soviet Union was toying with the idea of preemptive strikes against China's nuclear weapons plants.

These hints could have meant (a) that the Soviets were actually preparing for such attacks, (b) that they were courting U.S. connivance and (c) that the hints were intended to find their way to Peking and frighten the Chinese out of rash action along the border.

Soviet Psychological Play

The CIA regarded each of these possibilities with a good deal of seriousness. Eventually, it judged that the last was probably true, namely, that the Soviets were waging psychological warfare against the Chinese.

All in all, the intelligence problem posed by the Sino-Soviet border skirmishes—the problem of assessing how a situation in another part of the world may affect American security—illustrates how the CIA normally works in such circumstances.

An aide to Helms commented the other day that the man who is popularly known as the nation's No. 1 "spy" is not afflicted by the "007 syndrome."

This was a way of saying that in the technological age the CIA places little reliance on blondes, pistols with silencers and other James Bond trappings. American espionage agents do prowl the world, of course, and hopefully come through with a fair share of clandestine information, which is [illegible] the nation's intelligence estimates.

For the most part, however, the pieces of the mosaic come out of the CIA headquarters in Langley, Va.—a huge eight-story "think tank," rich in computers and Ph.D.s, and staffed by, among others, linguists, chemists, meteorologists, agronomists, cartographers, foresters and psychologists.

The pieces emerge from analysis and correlation of a vast flow of facts obtained by satellites, radio intercepts, U.S. diplomatic and military reports, foreign newspapers, technical journals and the observations of American travelers.

From the outset of the border trouble the CIA had its eye on the trans-Siberian railroad, since the 4,080 miles of double track between Omsk in western Siberia and Vladivostok on the Sea of Japan are the lifeline of the Soviet Far East. For the Langley headquarters, the task was to ascertain whether the volume and the nature of rail traffic indicated a military build-up sufficient for a major war.

Tip by Embassy

The CIA's interest quickened in June when the U.S. Embassy in Moscow discovered that the "Trans-Sib," as it's called in the agency, had suddenly been closed to practically all foreign travelers. The embassy made the discovery when it tried unsuccessfully to arrange a trip for a U.S. military attache, something it apparently does periodically to keep in touch with things.

Obviously, abnormal conditions prevailed along the line. On the basis of photographs and other bits of information the CIA assumed they were due to troop movements, and this assumption was soon supported by the eyewitness accounts of an American traveler, whose name and whose business remain a secret.

As the story is told, he was one of a trickle of foreign travelers who managed somehow to get a ticket aboard a trans-Siberian train despite the rash of cancellations in June. Furthermore, it is said, he was a railroad buff and was interested in things like how many trains would pass a particular point in an hour, how crowded the various yards and sidings were and who and what was carried by the trains.

Again, as the story is told, this man came home during the summer and at a dinner party in or near New York gave a graphic account of troop trains he [illegible] along the Trans-Siberian.

Someone connected with the CIA is said to have heard about the dinner and to have got in touch with the man. In any case the CIA brought him to Langley, eight miles from Washington, and pumped him dry on his observations.

The information he supplied plus the photographs of the railroad from satellites plus miscellaneous other information obtained by the CIA created the impression of a large Soviet military buildup in progress. Actually, when other facts and deductions were thrown into the scales the impression was found to be superficial and misleading.

Working from reports going back over many years, from old photographs and newspaper articles and from interviews with hundreds of travelers over a long period, the CIA's rail traffic experts calculated the theoretical total capacity of the railroad—a figure they will not divulge.

Many Factors

Out of the computers came data on exports and imports at Vladivostok: on how much raw material moves from east to west; on how much in the way of finished goods moves back from west to east; on how many tons of supplies must be shipped by rail to sustain the cities and towns along the length of the Trans-Siberian, and so on.

Furthermore, CIA experts calculated that it would take perhaps as many as 60 trains to transport one Soviet division and support elements plus supplies and equipment to the Far East. Along with this they calculated what tonnage would have to be shipped to support the slightly more than 20 Soviet divisions that were in the maritime provinces at the time.

Finally, another very significant factor was placed on the scales: the effects of the severe winter that had benumbed the Soviet Union in 1968-69. Routine CIA studies of the winter's toll turned up evidence that a large backlog of freight had accumulated along the Trans-Siberian Railroad, especially west of a weather-plagued bottleneck near Lake Baikal north of Mongolia. What this indicated was that in any case traffic on the Trans-Siberian would be heavy in early summer after the snow had disappeared.

Ultimately, therefore, the conclusion was reached that the troop [illegible] part of the abnormal traffic on the railroad and not a large enough part to signal war.

In turn this raised doubts about the seriousness of Soviet intentions to knock out China's nuclear plants. For no matter how "antiseptic" such a strike might have been it would probably have led to war on a scale on which the Soviet Union was obviously not prepared in the Far East.

Matching the movements of leading Soviet officials, the CIA saw none of the scurrying about and hasty visits to the Warsaw Pact capitals that might have been expected to precede a war.

No Urgency Noted

"We found evidence they were maneuvering to get support from the Poles and the East Germans against China," one official recalled, "but their efforts didn't have an urgent character."

If the Soviets had been preparing for war, another presumption was that they would air-lift military command groups and specialists to the Far East. CIA monitoring, however, disclosed no unusual Soviet air traffic. Similarly, there was no evidence of any unusual callup of reserves.

The CIA's analysis of Soviet home-front propaganda led in the same direction of these other findings: The propaganda lacked the emotional intensity and any deliberate attempt to mobilize sentiment that had characterized even the propaganda following the initial outbreak of the border conflict several months earlier.

The Soviets were not playing up atrocity stories or urging patriotic rallies or calling the nation to arms to defend the native soil or making other kind of appeals that would condition the people for war.

Thus, CIA analysts concluded: A spirit of cold war permeated Soviet propaganda on China, but no effort was discernible to charge the air with highly emotional slogans or to launch a massive campaign to rally nationalistic feelings.

During these same summer weeks the CIA applied much the same methods to the Chinese side of the border—and with much the same results. Photographs from satellites, radio intercepts, reports or diplomatic and military attaches from friendly countries and analysis of home-front propaganda indicated that China was not girding for a major war with the Russians.

The probing of events along the Sino-Soviet border last summer typifies the work the CIA carries on day in and day out, [illegible] the Soviet Union [illegible] along probing the United States in much the

Office of

John A. McCone

DATE 12/16/69 TIME

Executive Registry
69-6213

Dear Dick:

Thought the attached would interest you. I am sure that you saw the article, but just in case you missed it, I attach a copy.

Best regards,

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